

Sts. Cyril and Methodius Church outside of Gimli is another item on their heritage inventory. It was built in 1921 after two previous churches on the site burned down.

Memory matters

what's in yourz backyard?

“A community that has no memory is a lost community,” says **Wally Johannson**, chair of the Gimli Heritage Advisory Committee (GHAC). “Awareness of your heritage adds to the richness and vibrancy of a place.”

But how can communities hold onto these memories as people move or pass on? One way is through heritage sites, which can be repositories for collective memory. A number of Manitoba communities have created heritage inventories of their communities as an important step in helping them identify, protect and celebrate these places of memory.

Two years ago, the GHAC began a detailed inventory of all the heritage sites in Gimli Townsite, Loni Beach and South Beach. The first year they researched 55 sites, adding 45 the second year. Sites significant to the historical and economic

development of the area, such as Hangar #1 at Gimli Airport, the Arnes Harbour Fish Plant, the Unitarian Church, the distinctive log buildings at Berlo and Camp Morton Park are included in the inventory. Also included are 35 cottages from the early part of the 20th century, with the largest concentration around Loni Beach, that had never been studied before.

One benefit of the inventory, says Johannson, is that, if people are aware of a building's history and its relevance to the community, there is a better chance of saving it from demolition.

Andy Blicq, a Winnipeg TV producer and director and member of the GHAC, bought a 1918 cottage in Gimli and spent over 10 years researching and restoring it.

“When you save historic buildings, you save their memories as well,” says Blicq. “It's sometimes hard to put money and resources into heritage when there are so many other pressing demands. However, its history and culture is the soul of a community. What we preserve today grows in value in obvious ways, from tourism to

pride in the community to having plain old good fun. A great example is Gimli Public School.” Closed in 1974 and slated for demolition after nearly two decades as a storage facility, the school was saved by a group of dedicated local people and is now a vibrant centre of community life, home to a variety of political and cultural institutions.

Although it was a daunting task, the GHAC was not without assistance in creating their 100-site inventory. Gimli has an extremely heritage friendly mayor and council who understand the value of heritage on all levels and provided moral and financial encouragement to the project.

Another source of funding and historical support came from two Heritage Matters grants of \$5,000 each. These grants, provided by the provincial government's Historic Resources Branch (through the federal Historic Places Initiative), matched donations made by the community. A benchmark worksheet, included with Heritage Matters, helps heritage advisory

committees determine their strengths and develop their heritage resources.

“We found the benchmark worksheet helped us establish our priorities,” says Johansson. “It’s a very useful way to measure how well we are doing; we’ve had great support from the province.”

To celebrate its heritage, the municipality has used the results of its inventory in creative ways. With direction from the GHAC, local filmmaker **Matthew Wright** created *If These Walls Could Talk*, a 12-minute video featuring pictures and stories about the best sites. A PowerPoint presentation, featuring the first 55 sites, has also been created. Both will be presented in various venues including schools, conferences and libraries, increasing public awareness of Gimli’s heritage.

An exhibition of the illustrated inventory, including 14 pictorial panels with short histories of the sites, was presented on Manitoba Day at the New Iceland Heritage Museum. The municipality will also produce a history of the unique cottage types found in the area, which will provide fascinating reading for new and long-time cottage owners and visitors.

“Heritage tourism is booming and we want to get our share,” says Johansson. “The inventory will help us develop a walking tour of Gimli and a driving tour of the municipality which also will be promoted on the town website.”

St. Clements Municipality is taking a different route to attract tourists and educate interested locals. A combination of computers, global positioning systems (GPS) and heritage sites results in the modern day treasure hunt called geocaching. Geocachers find specific site co-ordinates online and use GPS to track down the actual physical cache. Once they find the site, geocachers add to or take from the cache; record their visit in the cache logbook; and report it online. It’s challenging and educational and, depending on the design of the hunt, can introduce geocachers to local heritage.

Fraser Stewart, longstanding member of the St. Clements Heritage Advisory Committee (SCHAC), says heritage geocaching is “having fun with history. It’s an exciting way to learn about local history and it gets young people involved.”

Three years ago, SCHAC became interested in geocaching as a way to promote the rich heritage of the municipality. With the help of a heritage inventory done several years ago, they chose 25 sites in the municipality and created a postcard-sized



A birdhouse is one of the many guises caches take at St. Clements geocache sites. This one is at St. Peter Dynevor Church, built in 1853 and a provincial heritage site.

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information card with pictures on one side and historic details on the reverse for each site. Geocachers can take a card from the caches, which are made from cedar boxes in various guises.

Jared Laberge, an enthusiastic 21-year-old member of SCHAC, researched, photographed, designed and wrote the 25 cards that geocachers will find. Laberge enjoyed the challenge, finding great satisfaction working with the committee and being able to affect his community positively.

As for the benefits of the geocaching project, Laberge says, "Families can experience the location and the historical information at the same time. It's an active way of learning rather than a passive one. You can get out and find the places where history actually happened."

Stewart says they have broad support from the rural municipality from the top


down. SCHAC received a Heritage Matters grant of \$2,500.

With the support of the Historic Places Initiative, Manitoba's Historic Resources Branch has "been very positive about our project. They gave us direction on specific historical points, helped with grant applications and gave us excellent support," says Stewart. "Although we had developed our own process, the benchmarks worksheet helped us identify our objectives. The two fell right into place together."

All the St. Clements cache sites will be physically in place and their co-ordinates posted on www.geocache.com in the spring of 2009. The cache co-ordinates will also be listed on the St. Clements website.

These two Manitoba communities researched and developed their heritage resources, boosted community pride, increased tourism potential and advanced

educational opportunities. Both projects started by taking a good, hard look at what's in their own backyard. What's in your backyard?

In Part 2 of this series, we will cover more heritage initiatives in Manitoba and recap the latest government resources available for heritage projects. 

For information on heritage services offered by the Manitoba government, contact: **Historic Resources Branch** at 204-945-2981 or 1-800-282-8069 ext. 2981, or visit www.manitoba.ca/heritage.

The next deadline for Heritage Matters grants applications is June 1, 2009, for projects to be completed by March 2010. For information on applying, contact **Nicola Spasoff** at the Historic Resources Branch: Nicola.Spasoff@gov.mb.ca.

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One geocache site is the home of Thomas Bunn (St. Clements pioneer, Metis farmer, and a member of Louis Riel's council). This stone house is a designated provincial heritage site. It was built about 1863 and still stands today.



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